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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA1174, THE OPPOSITION'S RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: A

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MANAGUA1174	2007-05-07 22:30	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

- <http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL KDEM NU

SUBJECT: THE OPPOSITION'S RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: A MONTEALEGRE-JARQUIN-RIZO ALLIANCE

REF: A. MANAGUA 1028

1B. MANAGUA 0810

1C. MANAGUA 0242

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Two former presidential candidates, Eduardo Montealegre of the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) and Edmundo Jarquin of the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), are working on forging a political alliance to counter President Ortega's increasingly authoritarian inclinations. They are also reaching out to another former candidate, Jose Rizo of the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC). Combined, these three leaders represent about 62% of the votes cast in the November 2006 election, and could present a strong alternative to counter Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the 2008 municipal elections. In a recent dinner hosted by the Ambassador, Montealegre and Jarquin deliberated opposition unity with five prominent Nicaraguan political analysts and Embassy officials. While Nicaragua's history is marked by numerous similar initiatives that failed, the current proponents believe that this one, like Violeta Chamorro's UNO, will succeed because it must. End Summary.

12. (C) Over dinner hosted by the Ambassador on May 3, ALN and MRS former presidential candidates Eduardo Montealegre and Edmundo Jarquin, respectively, deliberated with five prominent Nicaraguan political analysts over how to forge an effective democratic opposition alliance to counter Ortega's creeping authoritarianism and win a substantial number of mayoral races in November 2008. The political pundits included Emilio Alvarez Montalvan, Foreign Minister during part of Aleman government and a Conservative; Sergio Garcia Quintero, a Liberal-dissident jurist; Sergio Ramirez, a renowned author, MRS supporter, and VP during the Ortega regime of the 1980s; Gabriel Alvarez, a constitutional expert associated with the ALN; and, Cairo Manuel Lopez, a constitutional specialist and Social Christian. The DCM and PolCouns also attended.

Clear Objectives, Organization, Funds Recipe for Success

13. (C) Alvarez Montalvan opened the discussion by sharing his optimism that Nicaragua's opposition forces will coalesce and prevail over Ortega's efforts to turn the country into an authoritarian, autocratic regime. To succeed, however, the effort will require clear objectives, organization, and of course, financial backing. He asserted that funding alone is not the solution; without a clear

purpose and order, the money will be useless. Another essential ingredient is Nicaragua's youth, especially given that 70% of the population is under 30. Alvarez Montalvan added that civil society, particularly the Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN), must play a pivotal role in the opposition effort.

¶4. (C) Other Nicaraguan guests nodded in agreement, although views were divided regarding whether political parties or civil society should take the lead in the opposition movement. Lopez commented that the MpN represents only a small segment of the civil society and to be more effective, it should shed its elitist reputation. He suggested that the Pro Justicia umbrella NGO (over which he presides) could also contribute. They also agreed that civil society and political parties associated with the new opposition must create a common sense of purpose and spirit of volunteerism. Ramirez commented that President Ortega's Venezuelan-funded literacy campaign, eye clinics, and generic pharmaceuticals will attract poor Nicaraguans to Ortega's side. In addition to arranging rallies and demonstrations, the opposition must also promote social causes, for example, helping Nicaraguans resolve basic problems like water shortages and illiteracy. Most Nicaraguans are not focused on corruption and good governance; they want food and jobs, argued Ramirez.

¶5. (C) Although Garcia was less optimistic than Alvarez Montalvan, he ventured that today's political context is not as complex as what Violeta Chamorro's UNO opposition faced in the late 1980s. He explained that Violeta's coalition contained 23 parties and leaders competing for position, while this time around the opposition can start with the three presidential candidates, who together garnered 62% of the vote in last year's election.

Democracy Vs Autocracy

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¶6. (C) Montealegre posited that the crucial debate is not whether Nicaraguans prefer left or right leaning political parties, but rather, whether they support democratic or caudillo-run, authoritarian regimes. Jarquin opined that some of Daniel Ortega's personality traits are uncontrollable -) including the president's penchant for authoritarianism, a visceral loathing of free market economies, and his ingrained dislike for the United States. Jarquin explained that while he questions certain aspects of free market economies and U.S. policies, engagement, not empty, insulting rhetoric, is the proper manner to address these concerns. Ramirez remarked that while Ortega is a skilled conspirator, he is lousy at governing. Nonetheless, Ortega's disjointed, scatter-shot style should not be misinterpreted or dismissed; behind the apparent chaos is a man with a clear mission, warned Ramirez.

An Aleman-Free Opposition

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¶7. (C) Jarquin suggested that today's opposition should rally around two causes: defending Nicaragua's democracy and ensuring that the November 2008 municipal elections are held on schedule. Slippage in the municipal polls would allow Ortega more time to consolidate popular support in preparation for the 2011 national elections. To succeed, the opposition must be aggressive and focused in its criticism of Ortega and his political pact with Aleman -) calling Ortega on every failure to deliver on his campaign promises of zero unemployment and zero hunger, he said.

¶8. (C) Expressing his optimism over forming an opposition alliance with Montealegre in preparation for the municipal elections, Jarquin clarified that under no circumstances should PLC caudillo/convicted criminal Arnoldo Aleman participate in this effort. Montealegre seconded this view, saying that Aleman presents the main obstacle to unity. Garcia underscored the strategic importance of winning Managua's mayoral race. (Note: Edmundo Jarquin has publicly

stated his interest in running for Mayor of Managua, where the MRS enjoys considerable support.)

Counter Ortega through Aleman

¶9. (C) Monteleagre ventured that the most effective way to counter Ortega is by attacking Aleman. In weakening Aleman, Ortega will lose PLC National Assembly votes, which he needs to advance his political project. Ramirez agreed, adding that Ortega cannot afford to publicly defend any attacks on Aleman. Alvarez warned that once Aleman's utility expires, Ortega will find another Liberal to &replace8 him. (Comment: If Aleman's influence on his party weakens, PLC legislators will be less likely to endorse legislation that advances Ortega's interests and more likely to coalesce with the ALN and MRS legislators to block destructive elements of Ortega's legislative agenda.)

Rizo A Key Ingredient, But Will He Play Ball?

¶10. (C) While all of the Nicaraguans rejected Aleman's participation, they were unanimous that former PLC candidate Rizo should be included in the opposition formula. Jarquin and Montealegre agreed that Rizo will not attract all PLC voters, but he can draw enough votes to create a critical mass to reduce support for Aleman, whose pact with Daniel Ortega allowed Ortega to win the election. Jarquin noted that only Rizo can convince the hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans who voted for him that supporting an Aleman-controlled PLC is tantamount to endorsing Ortega. Montealegre then recounted his latest failed attempt to draw in Rizo, who after agreeing to participate in a joint Liberal unity tour in Matagalpa department over the May 4-6 weekend, suddenly backed out with the excuse that he did not want people to think he had joined the ALN. Montealegre questioned Rizo's commitment to the opposition movement and courage to break with Aleman. Alvarez Montalvan and Garcia offered to approach Rizo and coax him to &make the leap,⁸ although they also acknowledged that on several occasions

Rizo had been very close to joining Montealegre during last year's electoral campaign, but always capitulated to Aleman's pressure.

Watch out for Constitutional Reform

¶11. (C) The Nicaraguan analysts diverged over the advisability of lobbying for constitutional reforms. Garcia warned that negotiating reforms would open a Pandora's Box and would play into Ortega's hands, while Alvarez reasoned that opposition lawmakers must be prepared in the event the FSLN and PLC allies push for adverse reforms. (Note: The FSLN is jockeying for a constitutional reform that would permit consecutive presidential elections, while the PLC supports non-consecutive re-election, clearly to advance the personal interests of their respective leaders. Together, the two parties hold enough votes to promulgate constitutional reforms. The ALN and MRS oppose these measures, and instead, propose requiring presidential candidates to receive at least 50 percent of the valid votes counted to win the election on the first round.)

Comment

¶12. (C) The 2008 municipal elections may offer the last window of opportunity for the democratic opposition to contain President Ortega's apparent intentions to install a populist, family-run dynasty in Nicaragua. Ortega is racing to attract new voters to his side through a variety of social programs targeting Nicaragua's poor -- similar to Chavez's approach with Venezuela's impoverished. He will exploit whatever legal resources are at his disposal to remove competitors like Montealegre from his path and keep the opposition disunited. His control of the courts with

political ally Aleman allows him this privilege. The ALN-MRS alliance is feasible in Nicaragua,s current political context, as both oppose the caudillo-controlled FSLN and PLC. However, to reach the critical mass of support to win municipalities, including Managua, the ALN-MRS alliance must garner sizable support from traditional PLC voters.

¶113. (C) Nicaragua,s history is marked by dozens of similar initiatives that failed, but the current proponents believe that this one, like Violeta Chamorro,s UNO, will succeed because it must. Clearly, time favors Ortega and he possesses the resources through Venezuelan assistance to buy hearts and stomachs. How soon the opposition coalesces, obtains the necessary financial backing, and starts playing a visible role in helping resolve Nicaragua,s daunting social needs, will largely determine whether this latest initiative is yet another failed alliance, or an initiative that will prosper and succeed. Thus far, the bulk of Nicaragua,s business elites have avoided association with opposition efforts and declined to support them. The risk is that not enough Nicaraguans will awake in time, and instead, will be lulled into complacency, or threatened into silence.

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